

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**McCook Central School District
Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2003-2004**

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Date of Report: February 10, 2004

This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by Special Education Programs. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

Promising Practice	The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.
Meets Requirements	The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.
Needs Improvement	The district/agency has met this requirement but has identified areas of weakness that left unaddressed may result in non-compliance.
Out of Compliance	The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement.
Not applicable	In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.

Principle 1 – General Supervision
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General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Parent survey
- Referral list
- Publications of child find notices
- Yearly child find results
- Referral form

- Cornbelt cooperative forms
- TAT documentation
- Individual education program
- Comprehensive plan
- File review

Promising practice

The steering committee concluded McCook Central School District adheres to the state guidelines for reporting students who have been suspended, expelled, or dropped out of school. The district consistently employs licensed/certified staff.

Meets requirements

The steering committee concluded the district adheres to the comprehensive plan procedures when receiving documented referrals and serving students in public or private schools. The district's graduation rate for disabled students is commensurate with students who are non-disabled. Relevant school data is used to analyze and review progress toward the state performance goals and indicators. The steering committee recognizes the district's exceptional job of screening students through child find activities.

Needs improvement

The steering committee concluded the district needs to improve the teacher assistance team process.

Validation Results

Promising practice

The adherence to state guidelines for reporting students who have been suspended, expelled, or dropped out of school and the employment of only certified/licensed staff is a requirement as described under administrative rule 24:05:21. The monitoring moved this to meets requirements.

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meeting requirements under general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

Needs improvement

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified in need of improvement under general supervision as concluded by the steering committee. Through the review process, the monitoring team found the elementary teacher assistance teams are held at least three times a year.

Principle 2 – Free Appropriate Public Education

All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3rd birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Parent surveys
- Referrals list

- Publications of child find notices
- Yearly child find results
- Referral form
- Cornbelt cooperative forms
- TAT documentation
- Individual education program
- Comprehensive plan
- Review

Promising Practice

The steering committee concluded the district has policies and procedures addressing suspension and expulsion.

Meets requirements

The steering committee concluded the district consistently provides a free appropriate public education for all students with disabilities within their jurisdiction.

Needs improvement

The steering committee concluded the district needs to consistently document extended school year services to eligible students.

Validation Results

Promising Practice

The suspension and expulsion policy was addressed under general supervision.

Meets requirements

Through interview, the monitoring team agrees with the steering committee's conclusion that the district provides free public education to all students within the district's jurisdiction.

Needs improvement

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as in need of improvement under free appropriate public education as concluded by the steering committee. Interviews with staff supported the district's need to implement a consistent procedure for documenting and determining if a student is in need of extended school year services. The individual education program team needs to consistently document each goal that will be addressed, the beginning/ending date of service and the amount of service needed by the student.

Principle 3 – Appropriate Evaluation

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Parent survey
- Referral list

- Publications of child find notices
- Yearly child find results
- Referral form
- Cornbelt cooperative forms
- TAT documentation
- Individual education program
- Comprehensive plan
- Reviews

Meets requirements

The steering committee concluded parental consent is consistently obtained prior to evaluation/reevaluation as per federal and state guidelines. Parent input for evaluation/reevaluation is documented 85% of the time. Comprehensive evaluations are conducted prior to determining a student's eligibility for special education or special education and related services.

Validation Results

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirements under appropriate evaluation as concluded by the steering committee, with the exception of the issues identified under "out of compliance".

Out of compliance

24:05:25:04. Evaluation procedures.

The school districts shall ensure the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, as applicable, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.

24:05:25:04. Evaluation procedures.

The school district shall ensure a variety of assessment tools and strategies are used to gather relevant functional and development information about the child, including information provided by the parents, that may assist in determining whether the child is a child with a disability and the content of the child's IEP.

Through file review, the monitoring team concluded a functional evaluation in all areas of suspected disability and/or a report analyzing the functional information was not present in five files. The functional information is used to develop the student's present levels of performance which will link directly to the annual goals and short term instructional objectives. Transition evaluations were not administered for three students of transition age. Therefore, the present levels of performance did not include transition information linked to evaluation.

24:05:25:02 Determination of needed evaluation data

As part of an initial evaluation or reevaluation, the individual education program team and other individuals with knowledge and skills necessary to interpret evaluation data, must determine what evaluation data is needed to support eligibility and the child's special education needs.

In all student files reviewed, with the exception of speech/language and early childhood, the monitoring team found consistently listed on the prior notice/consent for evaluation the Behavior Assessment for Children (BASC) and the personality test, House Tree Person. Interviews with special education teachers indicated the Cornbelt Cooperative has informed them behavior assessments must be completed on all students suspected of a disability when requesting a psychological evaluation even if the referral information did not reflect behavior concerns. The behavior assessment is completed as a precautionary

step in the event of long-term suspension of the student. Based on this information, the monitoring team concluded that the district does not consider the child's individual needs when making the determination of needed evaluation data.

Issues requiring immediate attention

24:05:30:05. Content of notice.

The notice must include a description of each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report that the district uses as a basis for the proposal or refusal.

24:05:25:03. Placement evaluation. Before any action is taken concerning the initial placement of a child with disabilities in a special education program, a full and individual evaluation of the child's educational needs must be conducted in accordance with the requirements of this chapter. The evaluation must be sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified. If an assessment is not conducted under standard conditions, a description of the extent to which it varied from standard conditions (e.g., the qualifications of the person administering the test, or the method of test administration) must be included in the evaluation report.

24:05:22:03. Certified child. A certified child is a child in need of special education or special education and related services who has received a multidisciplinary evaluation and has an individual education program formulated and approved by a local placement committee. Documentation supporting a child's disabling condition as defined by Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act must be maintained by the school district for verification of its annual federal child count. This definition applies to all eligible children ages 3 to 21, inclusive, and to only those children under the age of 3 who are in need of prolonged assistance.

24:05:25:04.02. Determination of needed evaluation data. As part of an initial evaluation, if appropriate, the individual education program team required by § 24:05:27:01.01 and other individuals with knowledge and skills necessary to interpret evaluation data, determine whether the child has a disability, and determine whether the child needs special education and related services, as appropriate, shall review existing evaluation data on the child and input from the student's parents, identify what additional data, if any, are needed to determine whether the student has a particular category of disability as described in this article, the present levels of performance and educational needs of the student; and whether the student needs special education and related services.

Based on file review and interview, the monitoring team found that a student was evaluated three separate times; in 1996, in 2000, and in 2003. The student was determined not eligible for special education or special education and related services as part of the evaluation/eligibility determination process in 1996 and 2000. The student was reevaluated a third time in 2003. The ability and achievement scores from the 2003 evaluation again did not qualify the student for special education services. The psychologist then used the 2000 ability score and the 2003 achievement score on the multidisciplinary team report to provide a sufficient math discrepancy for the student to be eligible for special education services under the category of specific learning disability. Use of the 2000 ability score needed to be addressed and agreed upon by the team prior to the evaluation process beginning and not after a current ability score did not qualify the student. The psychologist did this independently without invalidating the present ability score and without following the team membership for determining eligibility as required by ARSD24:05:25:04.03. Also previous evaluation scores determined the student to be a student without a disability. There was no evidence that parent input/notice was given to the parent of the decision to use previous test scores prior to the meeting. District staff did not feel changing or adding information to the MDT report was an option available to them. There was no evidence in the evaluation report why the current ability score was not an accurate reflection of the student's ability. The district must reconvene as an IEP team, including the student's parents, and consider all current evaluations in determining if this student meets the requirements of a certified child.

Principle 4 – Procedural Safeguards

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Parent survey
- Referrals
- Publications of child find notices
- Yearly child find results
- Referral form
- Cornbelt cooperative forms
- TAT documentation
- Individual education program
- Comprehensive plan
- Reviews

Promising practices

The steering committee concluded the district policies and procedures are in place to address complaint issues and/or due process hearings. There has not been complaint or due process hearing in the past three years.

Meets requirements

The steering committee concluded district procedure ensures parents are fully informed and understand their rights. Parents have the opportunity to inspect and review their child's educational records. Surrogate parents are trained assigned if necessary.

Validation Results

Promising practices

District policies and procedures to address complaints and/or due process is addressed under meets requirements.

Meets requirements

District policies and procedures to address complaints and/or due process are a requirement. The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meets requirements under procedural safeguards as concluded by the steering committee.

Principle 5 – Individualized Education Program

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas

addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Parent survey
- Referrals
- Publications of child find notices
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- File reviews

Meets requirements

The steering committee concluded the district utilizes prior notice forms which have all the required content to notify parents or guardians of IEP meetings. All required members are present at IEP team meetings to develop IEPs for eligible students. The district meets all the required timelines.

Needs improvement

The steering committee concluded that although the district's IEPs contain all the required content they need to improve in the areas of consistently writing measurable goals, specifically identifying frequency of modifications and accommodations, and giving parents copies of reports on a regular basis. The committee also identified the need for improvement in consistently identifying the person responsible to carry out transition services, noting specific course work in the course of study, and developing the transition goals from the transition needs presented on the present level of performance.

Validation Results

Meets requirements

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirements under individual education program as concluded by the steering committee.

Needs improvement

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as needing improvement under individual education program as concluded by the steering committee.

Out of compliance

24:05:27:01.03 Content of individualized education program

A student's IEP must contain present levels of performance based upon the skill areas affected by the students identified disability. The present levels of performance are based upon the functional assessment information gathered during the comprehensive evaluation process.

In five files reviewed, present levels of performance were not linked to functional evaluation and did not contain the student's specific academic strengths and needs in all areas of suspected disability, including transition. Functional assessment must be conducted in each area of suspected disability, compiled into a report which is given to the parents and then brought forth into the present level of performance as specific skill based strengths and needs. Sometimes functional assessments were completed but not

brought together in a report form and sometimes the assessments were completed in some but not all areas of suspected disability.

24:05:27:01.03. Content of individualized education program

Beginning at age 14 or younger if determined appropriate by the placement committee, and updated annually, a statement of the transition service needs of the student under the applicable components of the student's individualized education program that focuses on the student's course of study such as participation in advanced-placement courses or a vocational education program.

ARSD 24:05:27:13:02 Transition services

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities. The coordinated set of activities shall be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. For each student beginning at age 14, the IEP must include a statement of the transition service needs of the student that focuses on the student's course of study. For each student beginning at age sixteen a statement of the needed transition services is required including interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages.

Through interview and file reviews the review team found transition evaluation was not administered for three students of transition age. Assessment focusing on transition is necessary in order to design an outcome oriented process which promotes movement from school to post-secondary school activities. Transition activities were addressed but were not tied to current present levels of performance and evaluation. Through interview and a review of four student files, the course of study did not include specific electives based upon the student's employment or living outcomes. The term "elective" was written to represent potential classes. Individual education programs addressing transition services did not consistently provide information as to who was responsible for carrying out the activities/goals.

24:05:27:01.03. Content of individualized education program. Each student's individualized education program shall include an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with non-disabled students in the regular class and in activities.

Through staff interview and a review of eight student files, the team determined justification for placement statement did not use the continuum of alternative placements to accept/reject the option most appropriate for the student. For example, statements such as "extended resource room time was considered, but rejected...", or "more classroom time was considered, but was rejected..." were written. Potential harmful effects were consistently reported in the justification however, the student's instructional needs were not addressed to describe why instruction could not occur in the regular classroom setting.

24:05:27:01.03. Content of individualized education program

The IEP must include statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the student, or on behalf of the student, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the student in order for the student to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals.

Through interview and a review of four student records, the team found the individualized education team indicated modifications "as needed" rather than specifically identifying the frequency and location. Modifications must be specified so that the level of service commitment is clear.

Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment
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After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary

Data sources used:

- Parent survey
- Referrals
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- Yearly child find results
- Referral form
- Cornbelt cooperative forms
- TAT documentation
- Individual education program
- Comprehensive plan
- File reviews

Promising practices

The steering committee concluded the district policies and procedures address the least restrictive environment for students with special needs. Student surveys indicate they feel they are educated with their non-disabled peers. The use of paraeducators in the regular classroom to help student with disabilities supports the district inclusion efforts. Their goal is to expand this practice in the preschool setting as well.

Validation Results

Promising practice

Through observation, the monitoring team noted the use of Alpha Smart technology which allows students to access the general curriculum with minimum assistance from staff and allows the students to be more independent. The district has also implemented a peer mentoring system in which non-disabled students use their daily study hall period to work with a student with special needs on a variety of activities.